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THE OLD TOWN OF HUNTSVILLE.*

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In the history of the development of our institutions, towns have always played an important part. The "tunes man," or townsman, of the forests of northern Germany, laid the foundation of that capacity for self-government, which is a distinguishing characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon race. The towns of Old England have ever been centers of English life and moulders of English character. In American history, Boston and Philadelphia, Williamsburg and Charleston, Chicago and New Orleans, represent essential and typical features of American life. To the student of the varied and romantic history of our own State of Texas, the story of our older towns possesses incalculable interest. San Antonio, Nacogdoches, San Felipe, Columbia, are names interwoven with the history of our people. Though not dating its origin so far into the past as the places just mentioned, yet Huntsville is properly classed among the old towns of Texas, in whose annals men and events are recorded whose influence extended far beyond the limits of the town and county.

In the year 1836, soon after the battle of San Jacinto, two brothers, Pleasant and Ephraim Gray, came from the State of Alabama to make their home in the new-born republic of Texas. They had previously secured from the Mexican government a head-right league of land a few miles southwest of the Trinity river, in what was then the municipality of Washington. On this tract they pitched their camp, near a bold spring of pure water, a few yards distant from the edge of a small prairie that lay like an oasis in the vast forest around it. Attracted by the beauty of the spot and influenced by the fact that the spring was a favorite rendezvous of the peaceful Indians of the neighborhood, the Grays decided to establish here a trading post and build their home. Two cabins

*Read at the Midwinter Meeting of the Association at Huntsville, January 9, 1900.

were soon erected from the logs of the forest, and a thriving trade sprang up with the neighboring Bedias and Coshatties and occasional passing immigrants. As white settlers began to occupy the surrounding country, the trading post developed into a store, the commodious log-cabin home into an inn, and when a new-comer, Thomas P. Carson by name, had set up a blacksmith shop, the beginning of the town of Huntsville was made.

The spring which led to the founding of the town on its present site still bubbles near where our electric light and ice factory now stands, and until a few years ago supplied with its never-failing stream the only public watering trough in town. The little open prairie included the present public square. The trading post of the Grays was on the edge of the prairie, near the present site of Mrs. Cotton's drug store. The cabin home of Pleasant Gray occupied the spot where the residence of our popular townsman, W. H. Woodall, now stands—in fact, Mr. Woodall's residence contains some of the timbers of the old house. Ephraim Gray's home stood in what was known as "the cedars"—the corner lot north of the present electric light plant.

The Anglo-Saxon is ever a home-lover. Even when banished from his native land he loves to perpetuate in the geographical terms of his new abiding place the names associated with his childhood home. It was thus with Pleasant Gray. To the settlement which he founded in the Texas forest he gave the name Huntsville, in honor of his old home in Alabama. Worth noting in this connection, is the deep interest frequently evinced by the people of Pleasant Gray's Alabama home town in the struggles of the Texas patriots. The historian Yoakum mentions Huntsville, Alabama, as one of the towns in the United States that in the autumn of 1835 raised troops and funds to aid the Texas revolutionists. In the massacre at Goliad, a company known as the "Huntsville Volunteers" sealed their devotion to the patriots' cause with their blood. Among the historic relics belonging to the Normal School is a muster roll of the "Huntsville Rovers," enlisted in the service of the Republic of Texas at Galveston, May, 1842. The captain of the company was Jeremiah Clemens, who was subsequently a member of Congress from Alabama.

In the year after Pleasant Gray established his Texas home, the

first Congress of the Republic replaced the old Mexican "municipalities" with counties. The county of Montgomery was created from that part of the municipality of Washington lying east of the Nava-sota river, and embracing Pleasant Gray's head-right league. Montgomery county then included the present counties of Montgomery, Grimes, Walker, Madison, and part of San Jacinto, and was soon the most populous county of the Republic.

At the time that Huntsville was founded, settlers from "the States" had already begun to come to this region in considerable numbers. On the Trinity river, some twelve miles north of the present site of Huntsville (and within the present limits of Walker county) a prosperous village had for some years existed with the ambitious name of Cincinnati. Situated on the highway, between Nacogdoches and Washington, with river boats plying between her wharf and Galveston, carrying passengers and freight, Cincinnati in that early day was a place of considerable importance. Who knows but that when the Federal government shall have improved the navigation of the Trinity, Cincinnati—now only a memory—may arise from its ruins, eclipse Huntsville, its former competitor, and even rival its great namesake on the Ohio? Danville was then another flourishing settlement in this region (now in Montgomery county). Mr. S. R. Smith, one of our oldest citizens, passed through Cincinnati and Danville in July, 1838, on his way to Houston. He found the people of Danville attending a great barbecue, and listening to patriotic speeches in celebration of the "glorious Fourth"—thus giving evidence of the closeness of the ties that bound them to their old homes in the United States—ties that were only strengthened by the lapse of time, and that finally wrought their inevitable result, a union under one government of those who were already one people.

In the period of the infancy of Huntsville, her citizens displayed that concern for the education of their children that made their town an educational center. When the place was hardly half a dozen years old, a substantial school building of brick, known as the "Brick Academy," was erected by the voluntary contributions of citizens. The land for the site of the academy was donated by Pleasant Gray, and is now included within the walls of the penitentiary, near the north front. The name of the first principal of the

Brick Academy, I have been unable to ascertain. He is referred to, however, in the town paper of the period, as "a teacher of splendid acquirements." In later years, when the school became a female academy, it was successfully conducted by lady principals, among whom may be mentioned Miss Melinda Rankin, afterwards missionary and authoress, Mrs. M. L. Branch, wife of Dr. John Branch, and Miss Rowena Crawford, who afterwards became the wife of Judge James A. Baker.

The era of the Republic had closed before the first church building had been erected in Huntsville. The Baptists, however, had a church organization, and divine services were held at regular intervals in the Brick Academy by Reverends Samuels and Creath of this faith, and occasionally by ministers of other denominations.

To this period belongs the organization of the Masonic Lodge of Huntsville. The minutes of the Grand Lodge of the Republic, Seventh Session, held at Washington on the Brazos, in 1844, show that a petition was presented to open a lodge at Huntsville. On January 11, 1844, the charter was granted with the designation, "Forest Lodge, No. 19." A short time later a Masonic hall was erected on the north side of the square, on the site the lodge at present occupies.

Towards the close of this period the first town newspaper was established. In May, 1845, appeared the first issue of the "Montgomery Patriot." Through the courtesy of Judge J. M. Smither, to whom I am indebted for many of the facts stated in this paper, I have been permitted to see a copy of the Patriot of date September 27, 1845; also early copies of the Texas Banner and the Huntsville Item. The "Patriot" was edited by J. M. Wade, whose office was on the east side of the square, "over Smither & Co.'s store." The subscription price was "four dollars at the end of three months—at the end of the year \$5," with the proviso, that "one-fourth of the subscription must, in all cases, be paid in advance." The Patriot had little local matter or news of any kind. It contained chiefly clippings from magazines and other newspapers. The advertising columns of the issue above referred to, contain a proclamation of President Anson Jones, ordering an election to decide upon the adoption or rejection of the proposed first State Constitution of Texas. Editorially, the Patriot favored the adoption of the Constitution,

although it objected to the large number of legislators provided for and the consequent expense to the taxpayers. The rates of postage under the Republic are printed, "ten cents for single letters less than a hundred miles; over a hundred miles 20 cents." The editor rejoices over the establishment of a stage line to Houston—with weekly trips "at the low rate for passengers of seven dollars each way."

The stores of Huntsville in this period of course carried small stocks. The goods were brought here, either by wagon from Houston, or by boat to Cincinnati, thence by wagon to Huntsville. It is related that Ephraim Gray was unwilling to sell more than three yards of domestic to any one customer, lest his stock be too soon exhausted. Planters frequently had their season's supplies hauled in wagons from Houston. The teamster did a thriving business and was quite independent. It is told of a citizen of this period who had employed a teamster to bring a load of hams from Houston, that after waiting a reasonable time in vain for the arrival of his supplies, he wrote his Houston merchant a letter of inquiry. He was told in reply that the order had been promptly filled, and the wagon had departed some weeks before. The weeks continued to roll by until finally the long expected wagon one day rolled up to the gate of the now irate citizen. In response to an indignant inquiry as to the cause of the long delay, the teamster coolly informed his employer, that as the road passed his farm in Montgomery county, he had stopped on the way to work out his crop.

What may be termed the first period of the history of Huntsville closes in 1846, when the new county of Walker was organized and Huntsville became a county seat. In the closing years of this period the town was incorporated by the Congress of the Republic. With an intelligent and enterprising population numbering several hundred, Huntsville now rivalled in size and importance any town in what was then known as "Middle Texas."

The First Legislature of the State of Texas provided for the formation of a number of new counties. On April 6, 1846, the two new counties of Walker and Grimes were created from a part of old Montgomery county. On July 18, 1846, Walker county was organized. The Democratic party having brought Texas into the Union, the people of the new State were naturally warm adherents of that

political faith. The names of President Polk and several of his official family are preserved in the appellations of counties created during the period in question. Robert J. Walker, of Mississippi, was Polk's Secretary of the Treasury, and in his honor one of the counties created from old Montgomery was named. It is interesting to note just here, that when, in the period of the war between the States, Robert J. Walker became a Union man, the Legislature of Texas, by a solemn enactment, repudiated all connection between the name of Walker county and that of Robert J. Walker, though the name of the county was retained.

With the organization of Walker county a committee of enterprising citizens of Huntsville, consisting of J. C. Smith, Henderson Yoakum, and Robert Smither, secured a handsome subscription from the townspeople for the erection of public buildings and with a view to securing the county seat. As a result of their efforts Huntsville became the capital of Walker county, and soon a brick court house took the place of the old market house in the center of the square. A number of new stores and residences were erected and the town was in the midst of its first "boom." In 1849, Huntsville's population, "by an exact estimate," was between 500 and 600.

In January, 1846, the "Texas Banner," edited by Frank Hatch, took the place of the Montgomery Patriot as the town newspaper. About this time Huntsville began to boast of a religious periodical in addition to her secular paper. "The Texas Presbyterian," an organ of the Cumberland Presbyterian denomination, and perhaps the first religious paper published in Texas, was founded in Houston, in 1846, by Rev. A. J. McGowan, a veteran of San Jacinto. Less than a year later the founder of the Presbyterian moved his paper to Huntsville, where he continued to edit and publish it for about ten years. The minutes of the Grand Chapter of Masons of Texas for 1851 were printed in pamphlet form on Rev. Mr. McGowan's press. In 1850, the Texas Banner gave place to the "Huntsville Item," which today enjoys the distinction of being one of the oldest papers in the State. The Item was founded by George Robinson, the honored father of the present editor. George Robinson was forced to suspend his paper during the war on account of the failure of paper supply, and he then enlisted in the Confederate army. A. C. Gray, in Scarff's History of Texas, says: "No paper pub-

lished in Texas during this period is more deserving of notice than the Huntsville Item. Without pretension to style, with no display of extraordinary energy or enterprise, the Item was yet always a favorite visitor to its readers, and exercised more influence within its circle than did many a more pretentious sheet."

The Republic of Texas had no penitentiary, criminals being taken in charge by the various counties. Soon after annexation, however, the Legislature provided for the establishment of a penitentiary, and enterprising Huntsville secured the prize, the institution being located here in 1847. The original penitentiary contained 240 cells, and covered a very small part of the space occupied by the present buildings. The first convict was incarcerated October 1, 1849. During the ten years following only 412 prisoners were committed. For a long time the prisoners could be hired under guards to perform various kinds of work in town. As a result practically all the carpentering, brick-laying, blacksmithing, etc., of the place was performed by convicts, to some extent retarding the substantial growth of the town by preventing the immigration of mechanics and laborers. The citizens fondly hoped, however, that the location in their midst of the first State institution was the precursor of their securing the capital of the commonwealth.

The State Constitution of 1845 provided that the capital should remain at Austin until 1850, when by vote of the people its location for the next twenty years should be decided upon. Ambitious Huntsville at once began to aspire to become the seat of government, and her aspirations were not without a substantial basis. A letter in the *Galveston News* of September 5, 1849, describes the town of Huntsville as "rapidly rising into importance, and already taking rank among the most enterprising populations and improving of our interior towns, with high hopes of becoming the political metropolis of the State." "To perpetuate the prosperity of Huntsville," the writer suggests, among other needs, "a good wagon road to Houston, a railroad to the Trinity, and the improvement of the navigation of that river." When the vote for the capital was counted in 1850, however, it was found that Austin had beaten both her rivals, Huntsville and Tehuacana Hills. Old citizens of Huntsville still console themselves for that defeat by attributing it to the illegal Mexican vote of the Rio Grande country, which, they assert, secured Austin's success.

In 1850, the contract for the first church building in the town was let by the Cumberland Presbyterians. This first church still stands, though at present owned and occupied by the Christian denomination. The Cumberland Presbyterians, the pioneers and former leaders of religious work in this section of Texas, long ago disbanded their Huntsville organization. The Baptists erected the second church building, the Old School Presbyterians the third (in 1855). The Methodists had the walls of their building up in 1861, when the war put a stop to its construction, and it was not completed until after the close of the struggle. The Episcopal church was not erected until 1868, work on this building having been delayed by the awful epidemic of '67. The first Sunday school in Huntsville was a union school, organized in 1847. About this time a flourishing division of the Sons of Temperance existed, numbering 230 members.

In 1846, or '47, a second school building was erected. This was a frame house, situated on a lot west of the cemetery. It was known as the "Male Academy," the old "Brick Academy" being now restricted to the education of girls. One of its first teachers was Rev. Dr. Samuel McKinney, father of our esteemed fellow-citizen, Hon. A. T. McKinney. The old doctor was a thorough instructor and stern disciplinarian. On one occasion, when conducting his school in the Masonic building on Court House Square, he was worried by the persistent inattention of his boys to their studies. The fact was that a great fox chase had been in progress for several days, and runners from the country had reported that the fox was heading toward town. Suddenly the unmistakable note of the hounds was wafted on the breeze through the open windows of the school room. In an instant every boy was upon his feet, and there was a general movement toward the doors. The doctor instinctively grasped one of his well-seasoned hickories and shouted for order. Then quickly reconsidering his evident intention, and remarking that he would either have to thrash every boy present or dismiss school, he wisely announced a suspension of exercises. Teacher and pupils hurried outside in time to see the fox, hard pressed by dogs and hunters, dash madly down Main street and through the center of the town.

In 1849, Brazos Presbytery of the Old School Presbyterian church resolved to establish a college within its bounds, and appointed Rev. Daniel Baker to invite propositions from various towns

to secure its location. In the performance of his mission, Dr. Baker held a series of meetings in Huntsville, at the close of which the liberal subscription of \$10,000 was made by the citizens to secure the college. The following year the institution was located in Huntsville. A two-story brick building was erected, and in 1852 the college went into operation, with Rev. Daniel Baker, D. D., as its first president. At a meeting of the officers of the Huntsville Presbyterian church, August 20, 1849, a resolution was passed suggesting the name "San Jacinto College," for the new institution, "should it go into operation." "Austin College," however, was the name selected by its patriotic founders, in honor of Stephen F. Austin, the father of Texas. The foundation of a good library, and considerable chemical and physical apparatus were secured, and for twenty-five years a college of high grade was maintained, with a patronage extending to distant portions of the State. In the seventies, Austin College was moved to Sherman, Texas, where it is today a prosperous institution. The old building still stands at Huntsville, perpetuating under a new name the memory of another hero and patriot of Texas history.

Determined that the higher education of their girls should not be neglected, the citizens of Huntsville, by another liberal donation, secured the location of "Andrew Female College." This institution, established in 1854, was under the direction of the Texas Conference of the Methodist church, and was named in honor of Bishop Andrew. One of the first presidents of the college was Dr. T. H. Ball, father of our distinguished fellow-townsmen, Congressman T. H. Ball. Andrew College was a frame building, occupying the site of the present city public school. After its establishment, the Brick Academy fell into disuse, just as the male academy adjoining the cemetery was supplanted by the preparatory department of Austin College. About the time Austin College was removed, Andrew Female College was discontinued by the Methodist church. The building was used for a time for a city public school, then it was removed to another part of town, where it now serves as a colored school building.

In 1851, the second session of the Grand Chapter of Masons of Texas met at Huntsville, and from 1853 to 1860, inclusive, Huntsville was the meeting place of this important body, whose annual sessions brought together many of the distinguished men of Texas.

It was a custom for the grand officers to be publicly installed in the Presbyterian church, and immediately thereafter for a banquet to be given to the Grand Chapter at one of the hotels by Forest Lodge.

Among its citizens, Huntsville has never lacked men of the foremost rank in all the ordinary vocations of life. Some of these whose conspicuous services to the public in the early days have made their names a part of the history of the State may here be mentioned. Henderson Yoakum, the pioneer historian of Texas, whose "History of Texas" was for years almost the only authority on the annals of our people, and is still a standard work on the period which it covers, made Huntsville his home, and found here his last resting place. A distinguished lawyer in his native State of Tennessee, Colonel Yoakum, in 1845, moved to Texas and settled in Huntsville. He served with gallantry in the Mexican war, and afterwards refused high official position that he might devote himself to his profession. His monumental history was written at his country home, "Shepherd's Valley," seven miles from Huntsville.

Dr. C. G. Keenan united eminent ability as a physician with a talent for public life. He was elected to the Third Legislature of Texas, 1849, where his ability and popularity led to his selection as Speaker of the House of Representatives. Dr. Keenan was for ten years treasurer of the Grand Chapter of Masons of Texas, and at one time served as government surgeon to the Indians.

Soon after annexation, Gen. Sam Houston moved with his family to this section, first locating upon a plantation called "Raven Hill," some fourteen miles south of town. The following year he moved to Huntsville, where he selected for his home a spot near a bold spring nestled in a valley south of town. His house, now the residence of Mrs. Smedes, still stands, with numerous additions and improvements, and is pointed out to strangers as "the old Sam Houston place." The spring, known as the "Sam Houston spring," is within a stone's throw of the State Normal School, whose name perpetuates the old hero's memory. When he removed to Austin as Governor in 1859, Gen. Houston sold his home place. On being deposed from the office of Governor, however, he returned to Huntsville and rented a home in the northeast part of the town. At this house his death took place in 1863. The leader of victorious armies, Governor of two States, President of the Republic of Texas, Con-

gressman from Tennessee, and United States Senator from Texas, now lies buried in the Huntsville cemetery, with a plain marble slab marking his resting place.

Gen. Sam Houston's negro body servant, Josh Houston, still lives in Huntsville, and is one of the town's most interesting historic characters, as well as one of its most intelligent and substantial colored citizens. Josh came into the general's possession in 1840, having previously belonged to Mrs. Houston's father, Col. Lea, of Alabama. He served his new master faithfully from 1840 till the old general's death in 1863, traveling with him over the State, and often acting as bearer of important public documents. The old man—now over 75 years of age—loves to tell of his first impressions of the stalwart Texas statesman, when he came courting his young mistress, Miss Lea, of Alabama, in 1839. There are few distinguished Texans of the period, 1840-60, whom Josh does not distinctly remember.

Antony M. Branch came from Virginia to Texas soon after annexation, and located at Huntsville. He at once took rank among the prominent lawyers and able men of this section. When the war between the States broke out he raised a company of men for the Confederate service, and while in the field was elected to the Confederate Congress.

The culture, refinement, and domestic graces of the women of Huntsville have done much to give the place the reputation it has always enjoyed. It is not generally known, however, that before the town was a dozen years old it numbered an authoress among its citizens. Miss Melinda Rankin, previously mentioned as one of the teachers of the Brick Academy, was the author of a little volume called "Texas in 1850." The preface is dated Cincinnati, Texas, 1850. The book was published in Boston, and is long since out of print. One does not need to read far in her book to discover that Miss Rankin is a native of New England, and possesses the idiosyncrasies and virtues of the New England character. She gives a remarkably clear account of the country, indicating that she had traveled over a large section of the State. In her sketch of Huntsville, she says: "There is perhaps no inland town in the State combining in so great a degree the advantages of good society, health, religious and educational advantages, and business facilities as Huntsville. A concentration of talent, enterprise, and morality is

proven by the history of the town, and gives abundant reason for predicting its future course to be brilliant and consequential."

In times of our country's peril, Huntsville's citizens have ever been ready to respond to the call to arms. In the Mexican war, a company of mounted riflemen was organized here under Captain James Gillaspie, and saw active service in the field. In the Somerville campaign of 1842, a regiment was raised in old Montgomery county, in which a number of citizens of Huntsville were enlisted. In the war between the States Huntsville and surrounding country furnished the Confederate ranks an unusually large quota of soldiers, among them men as gallant as any of those whose deeds of valor made the Southern arms immortal. The town was practically depleted of its able-bodied men. The celebrated Fourth and Fifth Regiments of Hood's Texas Brigade, who followed our matchless Lee over the blood-stained Virginia hills, contained each a company raised around Huntsville. Messrs. Hunter, Elmore, Abercrombie, Smither, Powell, Rountree, Hightower, Hamilton, Gillaspie, Farris, Branch, are some of the officers who commanded troops from this section.

In the late Spanish war, the officers and a portion of the men composing a company volunteered from Huntsville. Their services, however, were not required in the field.

Perhaps the greatest calamity from which Huntsville has suffered was the yellow fever epidemic of 1867. In a few short weeks more than one-tenth of the population perished. Families were broken up, business was paralyzed. It took more than ten years for the town to recover from the blow.

In 1871, the Houston and Great Northern Railroad, building north from Houston, reached this section, and it was confidently believed that the road would pass through Huntsville. The citizens failing to offer a sufficiently large bonus, the road was constructed so as to pass eight miles east of the town. When the people of Huntsville realized that the road had actually passed them by, they put their hands in their pockets and raised a bonus of \$90,000, which, with \$25,000 contributed by the county, was sufficient to induce the railroad magnates to build the Huntsville Tap. The arrival of the first train of cars in Huntsville, in March, 1872, was a great day for Huntsville. It was celebrated by a grand barbecue and speech-making, at which an immense crowd was present.

In 1879, the Legislature of Texas decided to establish a State normal school. A committee of citizens visited Austin, offered the old Austin College building to the State, and urged the location of the normal school at Huntsville, as a lasting monument to the hero whose unmarked grave is here. Their efforts were successful, and the first session of the Sam Houston Normal School opened in 1879, with Bernard Mallon as principal. Additional buildings were subsequently erected by legislative appropriations, and the institution has continued to grow in popularity and influence, until it is now recognized as a factor second to none in the educational development of the State.

With the year 1880, the historic period of Huntsville may be said to have closed. Since that time, modern ways and city airs have gradually taken hold of and revolutionized the old town. A new graded school building, new churches, a new court house, new stores, handsome residences, an ice factory, electric light plant, telephone system, and other evidences of twentieth century civilization are now found where sixty-four years ago the wind sighed through the pine trees that surrounded the trading post of Pleasant Gray.

Yet with what sadness may we imagine that the water-sprite who presides over the ancient and now deserted spring which first attracted the founder of Huntsville to the site of the future town, must contemplate the past history of her beloved fountain. In the ages ago, when majestic forest trees shielded its limpid waters from the noonday heat, the wild deer loved here to slake his thirst. Upon its surface the night fires of the Indian hunter, year after year, cast their red and flickering gleam. Then one day the crack of a rifle disturbed its peaceful shades, and heralded the coming of the white man. Still the Genius of the spring found solace for the loss of its sylvan stillness in the thought of its increased importance, as tired horses and thirsty oxen thrust their panting jaws into the cool depths of the trough into which its crystal water rippled; horny-handed and brawny-muscle teamsters here bathed their hot and dusty faces; while bare-footed boys and girls carried buckets full of the precious liquid to their near-by homes. But there came a day when all this was changed. Within a few feet of the spring that once had supplied the infant village with water, an artesian well was sunk, which became the source of supply of the city waterworks system. The watering trough at the spring was no longer needed and

fell into decay. The spring itself was planked over and hidden from view. The cold glare of a neighboring street electric light now everpowers the soft rays of the moon, as night after night they lovingly search for their friend of by-gone years; and the steady puff of the great engines of the waterworks system drowns the song of the mocking bird and whippoorwill, whose musical notes once mingled in exquisite melody with the ripple of the waters of the fountain. Thus is Beauty ever slain by Utility!